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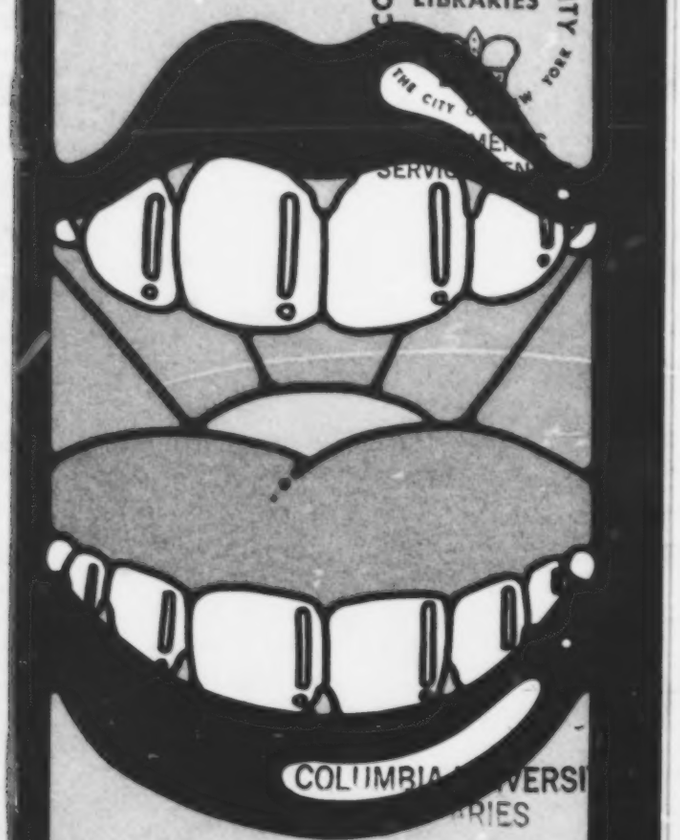

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A healthy mouth for you and your baby

Good teeth are important throughout your life. Regular tooth and gum care at home and from the dentist and a healthy diet are always necessary, especially when you're expecting a baby.

There's no truth to the old wives' tale that you lose a tooth for every baby. If you watch your diet and practice good dental habits during your pregnancy, you'll protect your own teeth and give your baby a head start toward good healthy teeth and gums.

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PROTECT YOUR TEETH

Good dental habits are mostly just common sense, but to keep your teeth and gums healthy, you must develop and practice good habits for a lifetime.

1. Clean Your Teeth. Tooth decay and gum disease are caused by dental plaque. Dental plaque is a sticky film made of masses of germs always forming in the mouth. When some germs come in contact with sugar from food, they produce acid that then eats away the tooth enamel, and a cavity begins. Other germs produce poisons that cause gum disease.

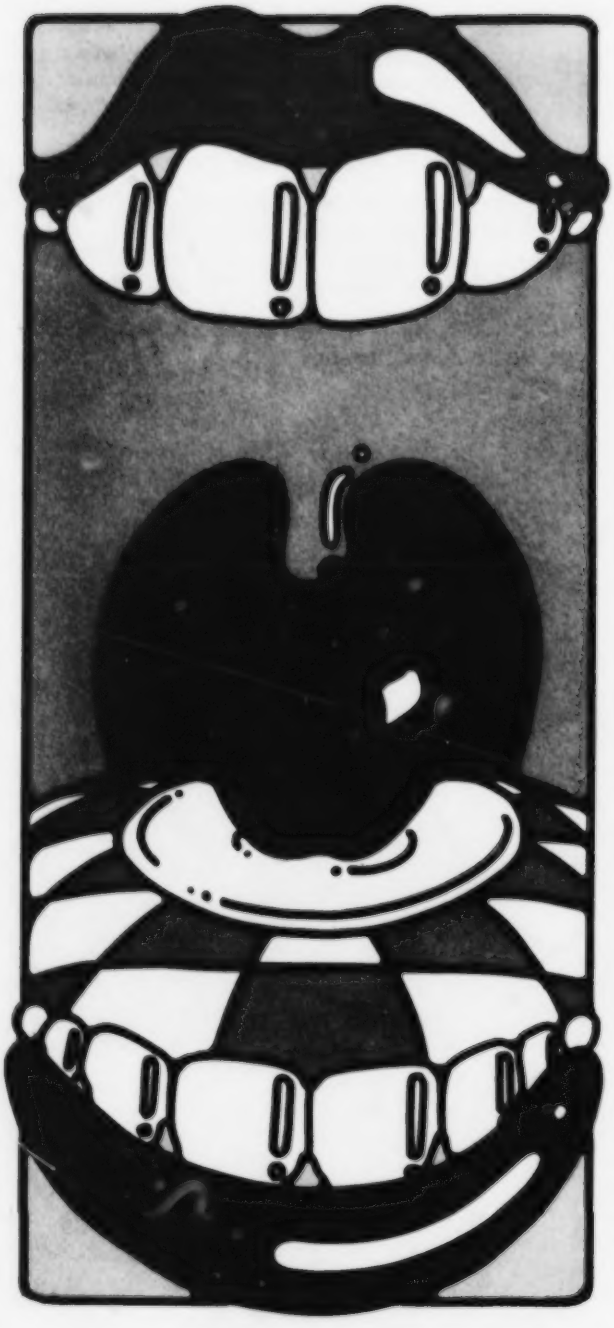
Cleaning away the plaque will help prevent both decay and gum disease.

Brush your teeth carefully. If you can brush only once a day, do it at bedtime. Use dental floss to clean between your teeth before you brush, and always use a toothpaste containing fluoride (read the toothpaste label for this information).

Get a new toothbrush every three or four months.

2. Watch Your Diet. Your doctor will give you vitamins and some suggestions about your diet. Every day you need to eat a well-balanced diet which includes fish, chicken or meat, milk and dairy products, lots of fruit and vegetables, and some bread and cereal. Calcium, important for you and your baby's teeth and bones, is present in milk and cheese, turnip greens, collards and kale, and dried beans. Calcium should be an important part of your daily diet during your pregnancy.

Eating lots of sweets and drinking soft drinks during pregnancy (and any other time) can lead to two problems—unwanted pounds and tooth decay. If you must have something sweet, eat it at mealtime, and brush your teeth as soon as you eat it. Limit between-meal snacks.



3. See a Dentist Regularly. If you have been seeing a dentist regularly, continue the habit during pregnancy. If you don't have a dentist, ask your local community health center, look in the yellow pages, or call the local dental society to see where you can get dental care.

Your dentist will treat any dental problems you may have and will give you specific information on how to remove plaque by brushing and flossing your teeth at home.

If you continue to have decay, ask your dentist about fluoride treatments.

PROTECT YOUR BABY'S TEETH

Your baby's teeth begin to form early in pregnancy. The minerals, vitamins and other nutrients a baby needs for healthy teeth and bones are supplied from foods you eat. At birth, the baby will have about 20 teeth growing inside tiny jaws.

As soon as your baby has the first tooth, you should begin the good habits that will help your child keep healthy teeth throughout life.

1. Protect Young Teeth with Fluoride. Babies need drinking water. If your water supply has adequate amounts of fluoride it will help strengthen and protect your baby's teeth against decay.

Your dentist or physician, can tell you if your community's water supply has enough fluoride. If not, ask about fluoride drops or tablets.

Drops are usually recommended for infants from birth until youngsters are able to take fluoride tablets. Fluoride tablets are prescribed for children up through at least 14 years of age. Fluoride drops or tablets should be taken daily during the years when the permanent teeth are forming.

In some areas, fluoride tablets are provided to children in day care centers and schools through public health programs. Other schools are conducting weekly fluoride mouthrinsing programs, and some schools have both programs. These all help fight tooth decay.

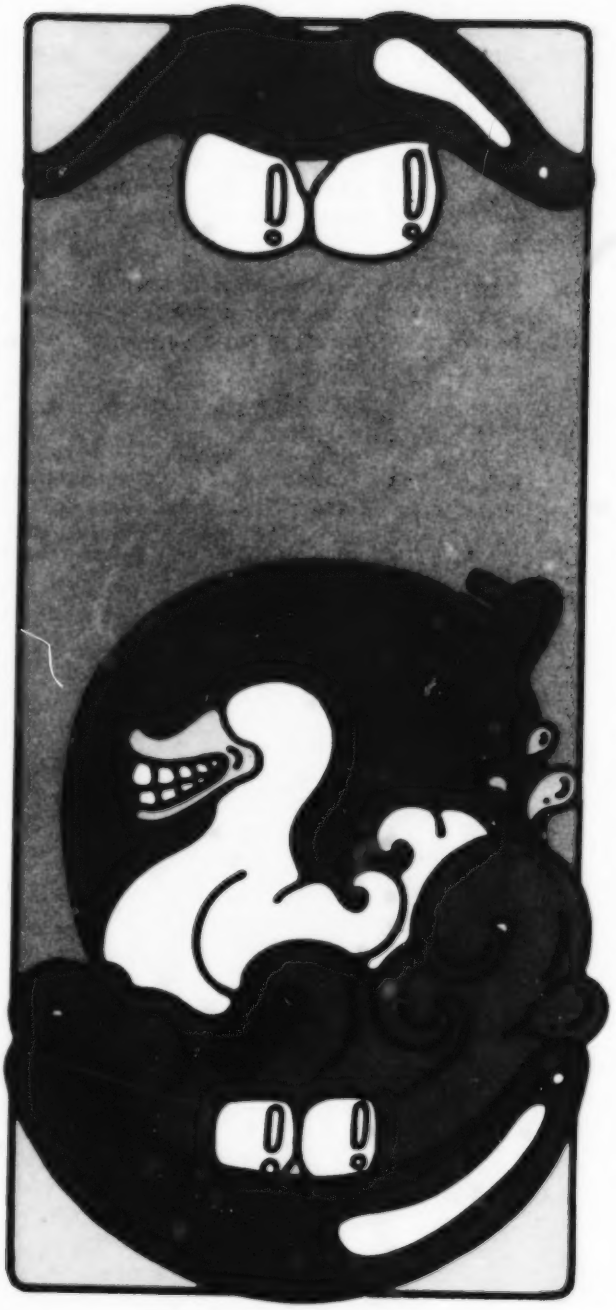
The use of fluoride toothpaste also helps prevent tooth decay. In addition, during regular check-ups, the dentist may put fluoride directly on the teeth for a few minutes to protect them against tooth decay.

2. Feed Your Baby Nourishing Food. Avoid creating a "sweet tooth" in your baby. Don't sweeten cereal or fruit to encourage the child to eat. Children will eat unsweetened food just as happily. Then when they're older, they'll be happy with slices of apple and raw fruit and vegetables if they haven't learned to eat candy, cookies and cakes. Children develop their eating tastes early, so set a good example yourself.

3. Clean Your Baby's Teeth. Baby teeth collect plaque just like adult teeth and need to be cleaned too, to prevent decay and gum disease. Usually the baby's first teeth are the two lower front ones, followed by the two upper front ones. As soon as the first tooth appears, simply wipe it with a clean washcloth or gauze pad. As more teeth appear, brush them with a soft brush gently and carefully every day.

By the time the baby is two and a half years old, all the baby teeth will probably be in the mouth.

About this time, children can begin using their own soft toothbrush with a very small amount of a fluoride toothpaste (no more than the size of a pea). But because your children cannot remove plaque, you should continue to brush your child's teeth until about the age of seven. Toothbrushing time should be a happy time. Try not to make a chore of it.



4. Prevent Baby Bottle Tooth Decay. Many babies who go to sleep with a baby bottle can develop severe tooth decay, often in their front teeth. Sometimes, these teeth become so decayed they cause severe pain and may break off or have to be pulled. The problem is not the bottle, but what's in it. The sugar in milk, formula, fruit juices and sweet drinks causes the decay.

Never allow your baby to nap or sleep at nighttime with a bottle containing these liquids. Never dip the pacifier in any sugary liquid such as honey or syrup.

Give your baby the last feeding before bedtime.

Babies who need extra sucking for comfort are satisfied with a bottle of plain water, an extra bonus when the water has fluoride. Don't be upset if your baby sucks its thumb. It's usually harmless for babies and very young children.

5. Take Your Baby to the Dentist. When your baby is about two years old, take the child with you on your dental visits. The youngster can watch you, sit in the chair and see that visiting the dentist is not scary. At about this age, regular dental exams for your child should begin.

Baby teeth should be filled if there is decay.

Untreated cavities can cause pain and sleepless nights for you and the baby. Lost baby teeth can lead to badly placed permanent teeth and problems with feeding and speaking.

Make it a habit to take your child to the dentist about every 6 months.

REMEMBER THE RULES FOR GOOD ORAL HEALTH

1. You can start caring for your baby's teeth as soon as you know you are pregnant by eating the right foods. When you go grocery shopping, cut down on the amount of sugar and sweet foods you buy. Keep your family's diet simple and nourishing, with eggs, cheese, fish, chicken or meat, milk, plain bread and cereals, and lots of fruits and vegetables.

2. Be sure your family's teeth have fluoride protection. If your water supply is not fluoridated, ask the dentist about other kinds of fluoride.

3. Brush your teeth regularly and carefully. Use dental floss at least once a day to clean between your teeth, and get new toothbrushes for the family every few months.

4. Never allow your baby to nap or sleep at nighttime with a bottle containing any liquid other than plain water.

5. You and your children should make a habit of visiting the dentist twice a year. Have any decay in your children's baby teeth repaired right away.

If you have good dental habits, your children will develop them too.

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